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1962/10/16

46. CIA Memorandum, "Probable Soviet MRBM Sites in Cuba,"
16 October 1962

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First Memo on the Missile Sites
in Cuba

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16 October 1962

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

MEMORANDUM: Probable Soviet MRSM Sites in Cuba

1. Photography of 14 October 1962 has disclosed two areas in the Sierra del Escamero mountains about 50 n.m. west southwest of Havana which appear to contain Soviet MRSMs in the early stages of deployment. A third area, about five and ten miles east of the first two, respectively, appears to be a military encampment. The first site includes 14 large tents, 15 smaller tents and 75 vehicles of a number of different types. The most significant vehicles at this site are six canvas-covered trailers of 80 feet in overall length which are of the general size and configuration of those used to transport the Soviet SS-3 (700 n.m. ballistic missile) and SS-4 (1100 n.m. ballistic missile). These trailers, of which eight more are located at the second site, are believed to be larger than those required to transport the Soviet SS-2 (350 n.m. ballistic missile).

2. The second site is 5 n.m. east of the first, and in addition to the eight trailers, contains four specially configured vehicles or pieces of equipment which could be used for missile erection in a field environment. At the time of photography, one of the trailers was in juxtaposition with one of these possible erectors. This site also contains 17 large tents, 20 small tents, 10 large trucks, 16 small trucks and 12 unidentified pieces of large equipment. No other missile associated equipment, such as instrumentation or propellant storage, have been detected. No facility to store nuclear warheads can be identified at any of these three installations.

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3. The dimensions of the trailers indicate that either the SS-3 or SS-4 ballistic missile systems are involved. Both of these systems are road-mobile and can be deployed with no heavy construction work for launch pads, etc. Both the SS-3 and SS-4 are single stage vehicles which will carry a 3,000 lb. warhead to a maximum range of 700 n.m. and 1100 n.m. respectively. The SS-3 system requires liquid oxygen as an oxidant, while the SS-4 employs storable propellants. From a logistic and operational standpoint it would be more advantageous to deploy the SS-4 system to Cuba.

4. We do not have evidence from shipping coverage or other sources to indicate definitely when the missile units arrived in Cuba. From the extensiveness of the present activity, we judge that equipment may have begun to arrive during September. At the time of the 14 October photography, a column of trucks and equipment was visible on a road within one of the installations. Although we cannot be sure, it seems likely that the bulk of the personnel and equipment were shipped from the USSR as an integrated road mobile unit, suitable for field deployment. The time required to reach operational readiness could thus be quite short. Assuming that the necessary fueling and handling equipment is available, that examinations are being installed, and that warheads are in Cuba or en route, an operational SSBN capability could probably exist in Cuba within the next few weeks.

5. The Soviet leaders' decision to deploy ballistic missiles to Cuba testifies to their determination to deter any active US intervention to weaken or overthrow the Castro regime, which they apparently regard as likely and imminent. This estimate of US intentions prompted Moscow's statement of 11 September which warned that an attack on Cuba would lead to a general nuclear conflict. The Soviets presumably believe that the presence of these missiles, which they expect would quickly become known to the US government, will significantly increase the costs and risks of any US action against the Cuban regime. They also probably believe that the missiles will reinforce the deterrent link between Cuba and Berlin which was implicit in the 11 September Soviet statement and in subsequent private conversations. Moscow clearly is seeking to portray Berlin as a hostage for Cuba.

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6. The Soviet leaders must have anticipated that sending missiles to Cuba would create new complications for their efforts to bring the Western powers into serious negotiations on the Berlin and German questions. Although they apparently expect a fairly prolonged period of maneuver and negotiation on Berlin after the US elections, this willingness to accept the risks involved in deploying missiles to Cuba does not in itself provide any clear indications regarding future Berlin tactics. It does, however, underscore the importance Moscow attaches to countering the alleged shift in the world balance of power in favor of the bloc which, in the Soviet view, will eventually oblige the West to come to an accommodation on Berlin.

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ANNEX: Strategic Considerations

1. In weighing their decision to install ballistic missiles in Cuba, the Soviet leaders must have considered the military utility of these weapons with and without nuclear warheads, the targets in the US and elsewhere which they could reach, and the strategic value of deploying missile forces of various sizes in Cuba.

2. Because of their type of guidance and relative inaccuracy, ballistic missiles have utility against fixed targets of known location, and not against such targets as convoys or naval forces at sea. The Soviet 700 and 1,100 n.m. missiles, whose CEP's are estimated to be in the 1 to 1.5 n.m. range, could conceivably be employed with HE warheads against large military centers and urban areas. It is highly unlikely that the Soviets would see any advantage in deployment for this purpose, but they might regard this threat as contribution to the deterrence of Latin American support for US or Cuban refugee operations against the Castro regime.

3. Deployed 700 and 1,100 n.m. missiles with nuclear warheads would augment Soviet strategic striking power by virtue of their ability to reach a number of American targets with warheads having yields which are not significantly smaller than those of current Soviet ICBMs. From the present base area in Cuba, 700 n.m. missiles with nuclear warheads could reach eastern US targets within an arc including Savannah and New Orleans, including 7 SAC bomber and tanker bases and at least one important naval base. (The 350 n.m. missiles could reach bomber bases in Florida, of which there are only two.) The 1,100 n.m. missile would threaten a much more significant number of critical military targets, including 18 SAC bomber and tanker bases, an ICBM base, and three major naval bases. In addition, such targets as the Panama Canal and US bases as far east as Puerto Rico could be reached. Both of these missiles have ranges sufficient to reach many US population, industrial and administrative center--including, in the case of the 1,100 n.m. missile, Washington, D.C. Installations of importance to the US atomic energy and space programs also would be within range of Cuban-based 700 and 1,100 n.m. missiles.

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